



THE HIGHWAY SYSTEM - ITS DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT ON THE UNITED STATES

Activity Item:

This activity uses the following online tool:

- I-90 Population Density Profile, 2010
www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/031

Student Learning Objectives:

- I will be able to interpret a data visualization that shows the population density along Interstate 90.
- I will be able to explain the purpose of the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956 and its impact on American society.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Looking at the **I-90 Population Density Profile, 2010**, data visualization, record your own observations and questions about the data.

2. The concept of the U.S. highway system was introduced to the U.S. Congress in a 1939 report called "Toll Roads and Free Roads" (www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/06mar/07.cfm). The report recommended constructing a "system of direct interregional highways, with all necessary connections through and around cities, designed to meet the requirements of the national defense in time of war and the needs of a growing peacetime traffic of longer range."

According to the report, what were the two main reasons for building a highway system in the United States?

3. Using your background knowledge, explain how the United States' foreign relations during the 1940s and '50s may have contributed to the construction of the highway system.

4. Imagine you were a business owner in downtown Cleveland in 1956. What concerns might you have had about the highway system's impact on your business? What advantages might you have anticipated from the highway system?

5. How is population density represented in the data visualization? How can you determine which cities have higher or lower population densities?
6. Are there any cities (represented in bold and with filled-in circles) that have obvious suburbs, according to the data visualization? How can you tell? Choose at least one city and explain your reasoning.
7. Using what you know about the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, explain the impact of the U.S. highway system on American society. For example, how did the transport of people and goods change? How did construction of the highway system change where people lived and worked? Support your answer with specific information from the data visualization.
8. Why would a government fund the creation of a highway system? Why could the construction of an interstate system be controversial?